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In a Fortnight

By L.C. Russell Hsiao

MAJOR RESTRUCTURING OF PLA MILITARY REGIONS?

A string of Chinese reports, which appeared in recent weeks leading to and following the People's Liberation Army (PLA) 82nd birthday on August 1, seems to indicate that a debate over reforming China's seven military regions is maturing. A major reform to the existing PLA's seven military regions, which served as the framework for Chinese military planning and operations since 1985, has neither been confirmed nor denied by official sources. The story that these changes may be in the offing was broken by the Hong Kong-based monthly periodical, *The Mirror (Jing Bao)*, which is a prominent journal covering Chinese elite politics and military strategy. According to its website, the magazine's articles are also used as "internal references" in various departments at the central government level, and valued by the Chinese leadership (*The Mirror* [Hong Kong], August/Issue 385).

Citing unspecified military sources, the journal reported in the featured article of its August issue, stirringly titled "China's Military Reform of the Century," that the PLA's seven military regions (Shenyang, Beijing, Lanzhou, Jinan, Nanjing, Guangzhou and Chengdu) will be supplanted by four "strategic zones" (northern, eastern, western and southern) and a central region, which overlaps the current system of military regions. The article, penned by Liang Tianren, stated that each strategic zone will reportedly be under the command of a "small military commission" (*xiao jun wei*) composed of different branches of the armed forces and several provincial secretaries that fall within its jurisdiction. The heads (*shu ji*) of the commissions would be appointed by the PLA Central Military Commission (CMC), which is headed by the current President of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and General Secretary of the

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Hu Jintao. These military commissions will be responsible for military operations and defense mobilization in the strategic zones (*Wenwei Po* [Hong Kong], August 1; *China Times* [Taiwan], August 3; *The Mirror*, August/Issue 385).

According to the journal article, the so-called Northern Strategic Zone will have jurisdiction over China's three northeastern provinces: Liaoning Province, Jilin Province and Heilongjiang Province, as well as Inner Mongolia (which is currently under the jurisdiction of the Beijing Military Region), which essentially replaces the Shenyang Military Region. The Eastern Strategic Zone will have the same jurisdiction over the current Nanjing Military Region, plus the East Sea Fleet, air force, second artillery and armed police. The Southern Strategic Zone will have the same jurisdiction over the current Guangzhou Military Region and parts of the Chengdu Military Region (Yunnan Province and Guizhou Province), and the South Sea Fleet, air force, second artillery and armed police. The Western Strategic Zone will have jurisdiction over the remaining provinces that fall within the Chengdu Military Region and the entire Lanzhou Military Region. The Central Zone will have jurisdiction over the current Beijing Military Region (excluding Inner Mongolia) and the Jinan Military Region, and Hubei Province (which is currently under the jurisdiction of the Guangzhou Military Region), including the North Sea Fleet. The status of the Central Region in the overall military reform plan is reportedly a contentious issue as there are disagreements over whether or not the region should be made a strategic zone (*Wenwei Po*, August 1; *China Times*, August 3; *The Mirror*, August/Issue 385).

According to a military expert cited in *The Mirror*, the plan to divide the military regions into strategic zones will be guided by four principles: 1) consideration for long-term national strategy; 2) suitability to future war conditions; 3) sufficient battle depth in each strategic zone; and 4) structural dexterity, operability and less redundancy (*The Mirror*, August/Issue 385).

Indeed, such talks of military reforms are not unprecedented. According to Li Daguang, a military expert at the University of National Defense, "[r]elevant discussions have been ongoing for several years." In a report by the *Global Times* (*Huangqiu Shibao*)—the English arm of the CCP's *People's Daily*—Chinese military personnel reportedly have been mulling over the idea of establishing a cross-sectional mechanism to replace the traditional decision-making procedure, which had been dominated by the land force for quite some time, and have described the current make up of the seven military regions as "redundant" and "not up to the demand of modern military modernization or

deployment" (*Global Times*, July 31).

Yet, an anonymous military source cited by *Global Times* ruled out the possibility that the Chinese military will carry out such a major reform this year, because "[t]he main tasks the Chinese military so far are to maintain stability along the borders and prepare for the military parade on National Day in October" (*Global Times*, July 31).

Although there are still noticeable disagreements as to whether or not the reforms will be carried out in the near-term or long-term, the fact that the debate is being parsed out openly in the public signals broader momentum behind the impetus for substantial military reform intended to boost the combat readiness of the PLA under modern conditions.

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Hu Boosts Military Modernization at PLA Anniversary

By Willy Lam

As the People's Liberation Army (PLA) marked its 82nd birthday on August 1, the Hu Jintao leadership has taken several major initiatives to raise the quality of its senior personnel. President and Commander-in-chief Hu has also given a big boost to military modernization by pledging unprecedented civilian support for the PLA's ambitious goals "in the new century and under new historical circumstances." Yet China's defense establishment still suffers from enduring problems ranging from an aging leadership to factionalism. Further, Hu's re-hoisting of the Maoist standard of *junmin jiehe*, or "the synthesis of the army and the people," could exacerbate the privileged, "state-within-a-state" status of the armed forces—and further stoke fears about the "China threat."

The prediction that the year 2009 could become a watershed for the PLA is supported by growing evidence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership's eagerness to show off the troops' state-of-the-art weaponry. During the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PLA Navy back in April, the authorities unveiled the first Chinese-made nuclear submarine to an audience that included military delegations from 30-odd countries. More sophisticated hardware, including jetfighters and missiles, are set to dazzle the world at a gargantuan Tiananmen

Square military parade scheduled for the People's Republic 60th birthday on October 1 (Xinhua News Agency, April 21; *Ming Pao* [Hong Kong], August 3). There is intense speculation in Chinese online military forums that Hu and his generals want to take advantage of the Obama Administration's just-announced moratorium on the development of high-tech weapons to narrow the gap between the two nation's combat capabilities.

At a CCP Politburo Study Session last month, Hu, who has chaired the policy-setting Central Military Commission (CMC) since 2004, noted that the authorities would do more to attract "high-caliber talent from society" as well as "different types of talents" to military work. He also announced measures to ensure that the next generation of military chieftains would be full of "enthusiasm, initiative and creativity" (*Liberation Army Daily*, July 25; China News Service, July 24). In senior-level reshuffles since early this year, Hu has broken new ground by moving more officers from the academies, research institutes and headquarters units to the frontline. According to the *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, the CMC has, since April, rotated 33 high-level officers among the four headquarters departments, the seven military commands, PLA academics and institutes, the People's Armed Police (PAP) as well as headquarters and grassroots units of the Army, Navy, Air Force and the Second Artillery or Missile Corps. For example, nine generals from departments in the headquarters have been transferred to grassroots divisions and military academies, while seven generals from academic and research institutions have been posted to frontline service units. The official daily said this had the advantage of achieving a "synthesis between military theory and practice, and between officers from headquarters and those from the grassroots" (*Southern Metropolitan Daily* [Guangzhou], July 28; *South China Morning Post* [Hong Kong], July 29).

In an article released on the eve of Army Day, CMC Vice-Chairman Guo Boxiong asserted that the PLA had been able to nurture a corps of officers who were "revolutionary, modernized and standardized." General Guo saluted the rapid "intellectualization" of officers as well as rank and file cadres. He disclosed that 61 percent of PLA officers with the rank of "cadre" held college degrees or their equivalents. Yet Hu and his military colleagues have yet to tackle two organizational problems within the barracks. One is that rejuvenation within the top brass has severely lagged behind that in party and government departments. The average age of the 10 CMC members is over 66; while that of the 14 heads—the commanders and political commissars—of the seven military regions is 61 (China News Service, August 1; Xinhua News Agency, August 1; *Ming Pao* [Hong Kong], July 30). To bring in

new blood, Hu has adopted unconventional methods such as elevating relatively junior officers to senior slots. For instance, the chief of staff of the Shenyang Military Region, Lieutenant-General Hou Shusen, was promoted last month to Vice-Chief of the PLA General Staff Department (GSD). Normally, a regional chief of staff has to become a regional vice-commander and then commander before being considered for this senior GSD post. Yet at 59, General Hou only has six more years of active service before reaching the mandatory retirement age (*Chongqing Evening Post* [Chongqing], July 29; China News Service, July 29).

An even more daunting challenge for military reform is cliquishness within the top ranks. The so-called Gang of Princelings—a reference to the sons and daughters of party elders—has occupied a sizeable portion of senior PLA slots. This is despite the fact that owing to negative public sentiments about "the revolutionary bloodline," the proportion of princeling cadres in the party-and-government apparatus has declined over the years. One needs only to look at the background of the three PLA officers who were elevated to full generals last month: Political Commissar of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences Liu Yuan; Political Commissar of the Chengdu Military Region Zhang Haiyang; and Vice-Chief of the General Staff Ma Xiaotian. They are the sons of former state president Liu Shaoqi, former Politburo member and senior general Zhang Zhen, and former dean of the PLA Political Academy Ma Zaiyao, respectively (See "Hu confers hardliner top military rank," *China Brief*, July 23). Of particular significance to factional dynamics within the CCP is the fact that Vice-President Xi Jinping—himself a princeling—has a reasonably good chance of being named CMC vice-chairman at the CCP Fourth Plenary Session scheduled for September. Since Xi is a probable successor to Hu upon the latter's expected retirement from the Politburo at the 18th CCP Congress of 2012, it is in accordance with party tradition that the 56-year-old Fifth-Generation leader be inducted into the CMC at least a couple of years before his elevation to the party chief position. Due largely to recommendation by his father, former vice-premier Xi Zhongxun, Xi worked for three years as a secretary at the CMC General Office right after graduation from Tsinghua University in 1979. Moreover, it is well-known that Xi has kept up intimate ties with fellow PLA princelings. Given that Hu and Xi are heads of respectively the Communist Youth League (CYL) Clique and the Gang of Princelings, Hu has a vested interest in ensuring that there will be at least a rough balance of power between the two power blocs even after his retirement. An exacerbation of the princelings' grip over the PLA, however, would upset this delicate balance (Asia Times Online [Hong Kong], July 10).

At the same time, Hu has sought to bolster his support among the top brass by promising extra civilian support in areas such as research and development of weapons and infrastructure, especially transport and communications. These massive resources are on top of the 15 percent or so budget boosts that have been granted the PLA for the past decade. The CMC Chairman said last month that army development in China would be marked by “the synthesis of the military and civilian [sectors], and of [the requirements] of peace and war.” “The concepts of a rich country and a strong military should be unified,” said Hu. “We will uphold the principle of joint military-civilian development, and push forward the benevolent interplay between national defense construction and economic construction” (Xinhua News Agency, July 24). This means, for example, that the planning of new civilian airports, highways, and ports should take military requirements and applications into consideration. And the fact that much of the R&D expenditure for military hardware comes from the budgets of civilian government departments is behind the widespread perception that the publicized PLA budget only represents up to one-third of the actual outlay for China’s defense forces. While the so-called *pingzhan heyi* (“synthesis of war and peace”) dictum was enunciated by Chairman Mao Zedong when he invented guerrilla warfare in rural China in the 1930s, Hu is the first military chief to have revived this ideal in the age of reform (See “Hu’s Tightening Grip: CMC Personnel Shifts and Increasing the PLA’s Budget,” *China Brief*, May 31, 2007).

Critics of the theory of “army-civilian fusion,” however, have pointed out that this will tend to make the Chinese military even more of a “state within a state.” They point to the fact that, compared with the situation in almost all other countries, the PLA has enjoyed a disproportionately large share of political and economic resources. In a *Liberation Army Daily* article dated August 2, CMC Vice-Chairman Guo again saluted the principle of “the party’s absolute leadership over the army.” “We shall resolutely abide by the instructions of the party Central Committee and the Central Military Commission,” General Guo wrote. “We shall resolutely complete all the tasks mandated by the party” (*Apple Daily* [Hong Kong], August 4; *Liberation Army Daily*, August 2). Among the nine-man Politburo Standing Committee, however, only President Hu has the requisite authority to influence day-to-day military operations. As the Sichuan earthquake demonstrated, even such a senior cadre as Premier Wen Jiabao had difficulty soliciting the full support of PLA and PAP divisions in emergency situations (See “Sichuan Quake Reveals Gross Failings in the System,” *China Brief*, June 6, 2008). This perhaps explains why immediately after the horrendous riots in Urumqi, Xinjiang on July 5, Hu had to drop out of the Group of Eight meeting in Italy to hurry back to Beijing in order to direct military operations against the “Uighur

splittists” (*Ming Pao*, July 9; *Asiasentinel.com*, July 9).

The CCP leadership’s less-than-stringent control over the top brass—and the relentless aggrandizement of the PLA’s clout—could engender concern particularly among China’s neighbors that hawkish elements within the defense establishment could prod the nation into adopting an aggressive foreign policy. Influential PLA theorists including National Defense University Professor Jin Yinan—who was one of two experts to brief the Politburo last month on global strategies—have noted that the PLA would play a pivotal role in China’s emergence as a world power. Jin noted that “China’s rise can never be accomplished in the midst of nightingale songs and swallow dances”—a reference to the placid pleasures of peacetime. Other military officers have urged tougher steps to resolve the country’s sovereignty disputes with Southeast Asian nations including Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines (Xinhua News Agency, December 31, 2008; *Global Times*, March 14; *Eastern Morning Post* [Shanghai], March 12). The upside of the Hu leadership’s support for fast-track military modernization is that this could generate national pride among Chinese and boost socio-political cohesiveness. The downside, however, is that a corps of generals that is not subject to institutional checks and balances could have an undue impact on the nation’s foreign and even domestic policies. In conclusion, even if CMC Chairman Hu is successful in raising the caliber of the top brass, the latter’s preponderance in Chinese politics could worsen already serious tensions between China and its neighbors.

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Xinjiang Crackdown and Changing Perceptions of China in the Islamic World?

By Chris Zambelis

The outbreak of ethno-sectarian unrest in China’s northwestern Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XAR) between members of the local Uighur community, an

ethnic Turkic population that is predominantly Sunni Muslim, and ethnic Han Chinese, China's majority ethnic group, has largely subsided on the surface. The hostilities began on July 5 during a public demonstration by Uighur college students and others in the provincial capital of Urumqi to protest the deaths of two Uighur factory workers in a brawl in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province. The demonstration eventually spiraled into a riot against local Han Chinese citizens (See "The Xinjiang Crisis: A Test for Beijing's Carrot-and-Stick Strategy," *China Brief*, July 23). Approximately 200 Han Chinese and Uighurs have been killed and over 1000 injured. Thousands of rioters from both sides have also reportedly been detained. Most estimates of damage to public and private property hover around \$15 million (Xinhua News Agency, July 8).

Given the extent of the violence, the residual domestic impact of the riots on ethno-sectarian relations and stability in Xinjiang is cause for serious concern in Beijing. Also, because of global media coverage of the hostilities, Beijing is wary about once again becoming the target of scrutiny by international human rights groups and major powers over its treatment of ethnic and religious minorities and political dissidents. The widespread comparisons of the crisis in Xinjiang with the uprisings in Tibet in 2008 and Tiananmen Square in 1989 in media and activist circles, for instance, are not sitting well in Beijing (ISN Security Watch, July 23). In addition, because of the political sensitivities surrounding China's treatment of its Muslim community, China is also worried that the recent crisis will tarnish its reputation in the Middle East and the greater Islamic world.

VIEWS FROM THE MUSLIM WORLD

In light of the recent events in Xinjiang, observers of China's increasingly expanding and multifaceted relationship with the Middle East and the greater Islamic world are asking whether the crisis in Xinjiang will affect how key Muslim countries view China. In spite of scenes of unrest and a heightened awareness of the Uighur predicament, the official reaction of most Muslim countries to the crisis, particularly that of Arab countries in the Middle East with a vital stake in maintaining friendly relations with China, has been muted (al-Jazeera [Doha], July 7). Similarly, despite being home to sizeable ethnic Uighur communities of their own that maintain close links to their kin in Xinjiang, the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, along with Pakistan and Afghanistan, have followed suit by keeping silent. The fact that the Uighur predicament is largely overlooked internationally outside of narrow activist circles has also contributed to the overall silence regarding the recent hostilities, making it easier for governments to avoid the issue. Unlike the plight of the Palestinians,

who live under Israeli military occupation—an issue that resonates deeply across the Middle East and the greater Islamic world as well as in human rights circles—the Uighurs are generally ignored (The Associated Press, July 14; al-Jazeera, July 7). In fact, the extent to which key Muslim countries, including Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim state, tried to distance themselves from any association with the Uighur cause in China is striking. A July 12 statement by Indonesian Ambassador to China H.E. Sudrajat illustrates this trend: "What happened in Xinjiang is China's internal affair. We respect China's sovereignty over the region and will never meddle in the problem." He also provided insight into at least one of the reasons underlying Jakarta's position: "The two countries have agreed to respect each other's sovereignty and refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs" (Kompas [Jakarta], July 13) [1].

In contrast, the official reactions of major Muslim countries following the controversial publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammed in a negative light in European newspapers in 2005 prompted an outpour of condemnations by key Muslim leaders and religious figures. The storm over the publication of the cartoons also provoked a series of diplomatic crises, economic and cultural boycotts, and public demonstrations in autocratic countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Pakistan where mass expressions of any form of organized dissent are typically suppressed by authorities. Remarkably, only Turkey and Iran have issued strong rebukes over China's handling of the recent crisis and its treatment of the Uighur community (*Financial Times* [London], July 14; *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 15; *Tehran Times*, July 15).

The official silence from major players in the Middle East and the wider Muslim world reflects the importance of China as a key regional and global actor. In spite of Beijing's record of repressing its own Muslim community, perceptions of China tend to be highly positive on both the state and popular levels among Muslims in the Middle East and beyond [2]. Spurred on initially by its drive to secure sources of energy and new markets for its goods, China has made tremendous political, economic and cultural inroads in the Middle East in recent years. For many Muslim countries, China is a crucial source for investment and a reliable customer for oil and gas and other natural resources. In spite of their close ties to the United States, autocratic regimes in the Middle East, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, also look toward China for diplomatic cover and to serve as a check on what they often see as Washington's overbearing influence in regional affairs [3]. Similarly, Cairo and Riyadh, among other autocratic regimes in the region, see strong ties to Beijing as a way to offset widespread domestic opposition to their relations

with Washington and to counter the popular perception among Arab and Muslim publics that they exist to further U.S. (and Israeli) imperial interests [4]. This support is crucial considering the widespread popular opposition to U.S. foreign policy in the Muslim world. In addition to the value they assign to strong trade relations with Beijing, Muslim countries such as Indonesia with a history of ethno-sectarian strife also look to China for support in repelling criticism from the United States and international institutions and activists regarding their approach to dealing with politically sensitive domestic issues such as minority rights. In this regard, Jakarta's support for Beijing during the Xinjiang crisis is logical (Kompas [Jakarta], July 13).

Moreover, predominantly Muslim countries in Central Asia, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan with significant Uighur populations of their own and a history of ethnic and sectarian tensions see the crisis in Xinjiang as a serious threat to their own domestic stability. Kazakhstan, for instance, is home to at least 300,000 ethnic Uighurs, representing the largest ethnic Uighur community outside of China. Kyrgyzstan is home to another 60,000 ethnic Uighurs while approximately 6,000 ethnic Uighurs live in Tajikistan (The Associated Press, July 14). Cultural and economic ties between Chinese Uighurs and their ethnic kin in neighboring countries help maintain a strong sense of Uighur identity. The trade volume of Xinjiang with neighboring countries topped \$14 billion dollars in 2008, helping make Urumqi the most prosperous city in the region (Xinhua News Agency, July 15). In addition to prioritizing their growing economic and diplomatic relations with China, the Central Asian republics fear that their own Uighur citizens may one day follow in the footsteps of their kin in China and agitate for more rights. Evidence of widespread outrage among the Uighur diaspora in Central Asia is a case in point. While refraining from mobilizing public protests out of fear of provoking the ruling regimes into a violence crackdown, ethnic Uighur groups in Central Asia have issued letters to international bodies such as the United Nations (U.N.) condemning China's actions (The Associated Press, July 14). Prominent Uighur activists have also gone so far as to single out the Central Asian republics for actively colluding with China to suppress Uighur identity and culture in the region (al-Jazeera, July 7). Like their counterparts in the Arab Middle East and other major Muslim countries such as Indonesia, the Central Asian republics are firm in their support for China amid the crisis.

A strong rebuke by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan during a July 10 press conference, where he labeled China's actions in Xinjiang a "near genocide," broke the official silence among key Muslim countries regarding the events in Xinjiang (See "Ankara's Reaction to Xinjiang

Crisis Raises Bilateral Tension," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 15). In spite of burgeoning Sino-Turkish trade ties, Turkish Industry Minister Nihat Ergun went as far as to call for a boycott of Chinese products in a sign of solidarity with the Uighurs, although he later retreated from that position. Ankara also threatened to raise the issue of Xinjiang at the United Nations (*Financial Times*, July 14). Turkey's reaction to the crisis is rooted in a complex set of factors. In addition to sharing the Islamic faith, Turkey shares ethnic, linguistic, and cultural ties with the Uighurs. Turkey's reaction to the crisis was also prompted by the de facto leadership role it assumed among ethnic Turkic peoples in the Caucasus and Central Asia after the breakup of the Soviet Union. In this regard, Turkey sees itself as a sort of guardian of Turkic rights. Unlike in other countries, where Uighurs and their supporters have been banned from staging public demonstrations, members of the Uighur diaspora and other supporters have staged a number of protests in Turkey in front of Chinese diplomatic missions (*Today's Zaman* [Istanbul] July 26; *Christian Science Monitor*, July 14; The Associated Press, July 14). The rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), an Islamist-oriented party, in Turkish politics also shaped Ankara's approach to its dealings with issues affecting Muslims outside of its borders, prompting a more activist approach to the crisis in Xinjiang by Ankara. Turkey also probably sees the crisis in Xinjiang as an opportunity to showcase its growing international profile. The tensions stemming from the Xinjiang crisis in Sino-Turkish relations may go as far as to impact Beijing's efforts to sell Ankara its HQ-9 high-altitude air defense system and further cooperation in the defense sector between China and Turkey. China's HQ-9 system is currently competing with systems offered by both the United States and Russia (Defense News, July 20).

While Turkey's reaction to the crisis in Xinjiang may be at least partially explained by cultural, historical and geopolitical reasons, many observers were surprised when Iran's clerical establishment issued its own condemnation of China's actions. On July 14, Ayatollah Jafar Sobhani called for the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and other international institutions to intervene on behalf of the Uighurs. He also added: "We just thought that only the bullying West violates Muslims' rights and deprive them of their basic rights but reports from China indicate that in that part of the world the unprotected Muslims are being mercilessly suppressed by yesterday's communist China and today's capitalist China" (*Tehran Times*, July 15). Other prominent Iranian clerics made similar comments (Press TV [Tehran], July 13).

Significantly, official criticism of China out of Iran has been coming from the clerical establishment. Nevertheless, the

timing of the criticism, given the ongoing post-election turmoil, is also curious, since China has refrained from criticizing Tehran's suppression of opposition elements. In contrast, statements from diplomatic and elected officials about the crisis in Xinjiang have tended to be more measured. While expressing concern for the plight of Muslims in China and calling for peace and calm during a July 12 telephone conversation with his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi, for instance, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki also added that the meddling of "Western governments" was to blame for the crisis (Press TV, July 12). Iranian government officials also had to defend themselves from a barrage of criticism from influential clerics who accuse the state of failing to do enough for the Uighurs. Among other things, a number of senior clerics have suggested that the Iranian state is operating a doubled-standard in its approach to the crisis in Xinjiang and relations with China compared to its actions related to Palestine and other issues important to Muslims (Press TV, July 27).

The apparent disconnect between certain key members of the clerical establishment and the state appears to represent a major dilemma for Tehran. Both Iran and China maintain close diplomatic, economic and military ties. Moreover, as Iran continues to face increasing pressure from the United States and Israel regarding its nuclear program, it likely sees China as a deterrent to any potential U.S. or Israeli military action due to Beijing's major stake in Iranian energy resources. The decision by key clerics to speak out against China may represent an effort on their part to reach out to Muslims across the globe by showcasing Iran's credentials as an advocate for Muslim rights during a period where the Islamic Republic appears to be under siege from hostile forces operating within and outside of its borders. The official stance of the political establishment, however, while keen on showcasing Iran's religious credentials, also likely calculates the importance of maintaining strong Sino-Iranian ties during this crucial period in the Islamic Republic's history. Going out of its way to lambast China over the crisis in Xinjiang is not in Iran's interest.

AL-QAEDA ENTERS THE FOLD

While key Muslim heads of state have largely remained silent about the events in Xinjiang in order to remain in China's good graces, al-Qaeda's Algerian-based North African affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), has singled out China for its actions by announcing its intent on July 14 to exact revenge against China and its interests. Among other things, AQIM declared its intent to attack Chinese workers in North Africa. Beijing has warned its citizens working in North Africa and elsewhere to remain vigilant. Approximately 50,000 Chinese workers are estimated to be working in Algeria alone (People's

Daily Online, July 15; *The Times* [London], July 15). This threat is reportedly the first time al-Qaeda or an al-Qaeda-affiliated movement threatened China directly.

Radical Islamist militants often claim to act on behalf of oppressed Muslims. As a result, regimes viewed as illegitimate, corrupt, despotic, and beholden to U.S. and other foreign interests are often targeted for their perceived complicity in the repression of Muslims. The overall silence from key Muslim countries regarding the plight of the Uighurs out of deference to Beijing is a case in point. While al-Qaeda's primary targets remain the United States and U.S. interests and allies abroad, the crisis in Xinjiang has at the very least presented Islamic militants with another opportunity to further their cause, this time at the potential expense of China.

CONCLUSION

While it is clearly in China's interest to resolve the crisis in Xinjiang on terms that promote long-term reconciliation and stability and address the legitimate grievances of the Uighur community, the recent violence will have little impact on Beijing's relations with the Middle East and wider Islamic world. Turkish and Iranian criticism of China, which at this point has amounted to little more than rhetoric in the first place, will likely prove to be an exception rather than a precursor of future trends. In the long run, China's diplomatic and economic clout is too important to ignore. International human rights groups and Uighur advocacy organizations operating in the diaspora, however, may become emboldened by the recent events to step up their campaigns to pressure Beijing to improve its treatment of ethnic and sectarian minorities and political dissidents. For now, China appears to have weathered the storm of criticism in the world of international Muslim opinion. The realities of Chinese political and economic power and a new geopolitics are working in China's favor, especially on the state-to-state level. The emergence of future crises in Xinjiang, however, may not prove to be as benign for domestic stability and China's position in the Islamic world.

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NOTES

1. Uighur activists have noted the stark contrast between U.S. rhetoric and media coverage regarding the post-election turmoil in Iran and Washington's reaction to the violence in Xinjiang. Rebiya Kadeer, an influential Uighur

activist living in exile in the United States, stated that she was “perplexed and disappointed” by what she labeled as Washington’s “somewhat cold” reaction to the crisis. Meanwhile, China’s vice foreign minister Wang Guangya, commenting on Beijing’s reaction to the U.S. position on the crisis “expressed our appreciation for the moderate attitude of the United States so far” (Agence France-Presse, July 29).

2. For public opinion polling data indicating favorable Arab and Muslim perceptions of China versus unfavorable opinions of the United States, see “2008 Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll,” University of Maryland (with Zogby International), March 2008, http://www.brookings.edu/topics/~media/Files/events/2008/0414_middle_east/0414_middle_east_telhami.pdf.

3. Chris Zambelis and Brandon Gentry, “China Through Arab Eyes: American Influence in the Middle East,” *Parameters*, Vol. 38, Iss. No. 1, Spring 2008, pp. 60-72, at www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/08spring/zambelis.pdf.

4. For Arab and Muslim public opinion polling data regarding perceptions of the United States and U.S. foreign policy, see “2009 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey,” University of Maryland (w/ Zogby International), May 2009, www.brookings.edu/events/2009/~media/Files/events/2009/0519_arab_opinion/2009_arab_public_opinion_poll.pdf.

China’s Russian Far East

By Stephen Blank

On April 21, 2009, China formally concluded an agreement to lend \$25 billion to Russian state-owned oil company Rosneft and pipeline monopoly Transneft in exchange for the completion of an oil pipeline from Skovorodino in Russia to Daqing in China. Russian commentators claim that the deal was not commercially favorable to China [1]. That contention, however, is arguably misplaced. Admittedly, the price of the oil was set at the floating price of Brent crude oil when it arrives at the projected Kozmino Bay terminal and Russia has finally gained an Asian entrée for its energy exports. Yet, while Chinese leaders may cringe at the deal’s price tag, Beijing has gained serious geopolitical advantages over Moscow in the Russian Far East (RFE) because of the effect that the global economic crisis is having on the latter’s economy and on Moscow’s ability to control the RFE. Moscow also now looks favorably on China’s investments in Central Asia. By opening up the RFE to Chinese investment and blessing similar investments in Central Asia, Moscow is reversing its policies toward both the Far East and Central

Asia. In effect, this and other similar deals opens the door to a huge expansion—with Moscow’s assent—of China’s strategic profile in both regions. The creation of a new regional order in the RFE and Central Asia is beginning to take shape and China is set to become the region’s security manager, ensuring foremost that its portfolio investments are safe and secure.

The deal provided the impetus for significant increases in Chinese access to the development of Russian energy assets in the RFE that has hitherto been blocked (Asia Times Online, February 24). Since Moscow failed to develop the RFE under present economic conditions, it had to invite Chinese participation starting in late 2008 when it began to negotiate this loan. Although the direct cause of this move is the global economic crisis, the root cause is the mismanagement of the Russian energy industry, which is Moscow’s main—if not only—trump card in the Far East. Yet, in doing so Moscow is undermining what experts say has been the strategic rationale behind its East Asian policy. That policy operated on the premise that Moscow would use its energy revenues to develop the RFE and Eastern Siberia further and promote Russia’s full integration into Northeast Asia as a major great power [2]. The failure of this policy does not bode well for Russia’s quest to be recognized as an independent and key player in Asia.

On May 21, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev admitted in a rare public acknowledgement that unless China invested in large-scale projects in the RFE, Moscow’s plans to develop the region could not materialize. The acute decline of the Russian economy is clearly illustrated by the contraction of foreign trade, which had contracted by one-third since the start of the year to May 2009. As of June 2009 forecasts predict an 8 percent decrease in GDP, and the government is now cutting the budget and being forced into ever more crisis-driven policies [3].

Medvedev candidly stated that the economic development of the RFE cannot depend on Russia’s ties with Europe but rather its ties with Russia’s main Asia-Pacific partners. He also stressed that the RFE’s regional development strategy must be coordinated in tandem with China’s regional strategy of rejuvenating its old industrial base in Northeast China (e.g. Heilongjiang province) (People’s Daily Online, May 21; Kremlin.ru, May 21). Other officials quickly followed suit. Army General Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of the Russian Security Council, subsequently conceded the weaknesses of the RFE’s infrastructure and outlined the RFE’s most important priorities: “The development of cross border cooperation with neighboring countries,

enhancement of transit possibilities, development of infrastructure and capacities for wood processing, seafood processing and output of products competitive on the world market” (ITAR-TASS, July 3. While liberal and other critics of the regime continued to warn about Chinese encroachment in the Far East, the government’s leading spokesmen praised Russo-Chinese relations as being at their highest point ever. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Rybakov actually lauded Chinese investment in Central Asia for its “transparency” [4]. Furthermore, Rybakov declared that,

“We believe that our friends and partners in Central Asia are appropriately meeting the situation and solving the task facing them in the sphere of economic and social development using the opportunities that present themselves as a result of cooperation with China. Hence this can only be welcomed” [5].

The Russian leaders’ statements constitute a reversal of Moscow’s past policy of trying to prevent Chinese economic penetration of Central Asia, which was meant to avoid economic competition, and probably confrontation, with China in the region. Moscow’s elite has hitherto regarded any gain by Beijing in Central Asia with unease, and the Russian media has repeatedly speculated about China’s economic “conquest” of Central Asia (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 28, 2007) [6]. As a 2007 report of the Russian-Chinese Business Council observed,

Being a member of the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), China views other members of the organization as promising markets. It is China that wishes to be the engine behind the trade and economic cooperation within the framework of the SCO ... China’s intentions to form [a] so-called economic space within the SCO are well known. Owing to that fact, experts have been speaking about greater Chinese economic expansion in various parts of the world, including Central Asia ... Beijing has activated ties with all Central Asian countries and strives to comprehensively strengthen economic relations and the dependency of these countries on its market (Interfax, November 15, 2007).

Rybakov’s remarks reveal a significant change in Russian policy and a major concession to China. Yet the real payoff to both sides—although primarily to China apart from this unprecedented concession—can be found in the new and recent energy deals.

Beijing naturally welcomed this initiative. At the June 16-17 summit with China, Medvedev admitted that, “we

riveted much attention to investment breakthrough.” Medvedev stressed both sides’ acceptance of the need for a qualitative breakthrough and the readiness of Chinese firms to make sizable investments in energy facilities, timber processing and transport infrastructure in the RFE (ITAR-TASS, June 17; Xinhua News Agency, June 15 & 17). Russia’s Bank for Development and Foreign Economic Affairs, Vnesheconombank (VEB), had to borrow money from China. As a major stockholder in Russia’s largest oil company, Lukoil, China also indirectly has leverage over that firm. After having excluded foreign firms from bidding on the huge Udokan copper mine in Southeast Siberia, Moscow had to reopen the bidding to Chinese, South Korean, and Kazakh mining and refining enterprises. All these moves constitute a major reversal of past Russian policy in energy and mineral investment dating back to 2003 (Asia Times Online, July 1; Interfax Russia & CIS Oil and Gas Weekly, June 17; Forbes, June 29). Similarly, under the terms of the new agreement, Russian companies may invest in oil exploration and natural gas distribution in China (for which they lack the capital at present) but that Chinese firms (who have huge amounts of capital for investment) may also invest in developing oil and gas fields in Russia along with liquefaction plants (Bloomberg News, June 30). It appears that the following deals were consummated at the June 16-17 Sino-Russian summit in Moscow, some of which were listed above. More specifically,

“On June 17, Medvedev and Hu signed a joint statement. Both sides also signed memoranda of understanding (MOU) on gas and coal cooperation, trade promotion, an investment cooperation blueprint, a framework agreement on [a] \$700 million loan from China’s Export-Import Bank to Russia’s VEB (Vnesheconombank), and an additional MOU between Renova and China’s state gold mining corporation” (Asia Times Online, July 22).

Also on June 17, Lukoil and Sinopec signed a contract to supply 3 million tons of crude oil from the South Hylchuyu deposit in Nemets Autonomous Region in Russia between July 1, 2009 and June 30, 2010 (Asia Times Online, July 22). Since then the Liaoning Xiyang group announced that it will invest in the development of a 1 billion-ton iron ore deposit at the Berezov deposit, 20 kilometers (km) north of the Inner Mongolian border town of Shiwei (Caijing Online, July 20). Aside from these events, China

has become Russia's largest trading partner as a result of the current crisis. Russia and China are discussing co-production arrangements in oil, gas, and electric power settlements and deals totaling \$100 billion, the use of their national currencies in mutual settlements, and Russian officials are even promoting both the ruble and the Renminbi as new international reserve currencies (ITAR-TASS, June 17; Interfax, June 16 & 17; Interfax Russia & CIS Oil and Gas Weekly, June 17).

On June 17 Medvedev claimed that he had clinched deals with China on energy totaling \$100 billion by a "special mechanism," a reference to the April 21 deal.

CHINA'S STRATEGY TRIUMPHS DUE TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

China has naturally welcomed these opportunities for expanding its influence over Russian and Central Asian energy and other assets and is moving to take advantage of them through these deals and energy purchases in Russia, Turkmenistan, and Kazakshtan, and by expanding its loans and investments in the Central Asian states. Given the subtlety that characterizes Chinese policy toward the region, Beijing will not loudly proclaim a new order in Asia, but it is finally in a position to realize the goals it set out to achieve in 2002-03 when it first began to invest in Russian and Central Asian energy in anticipation of becoming an energy importer.

China first sought to buy into the Slavneft oil firm in 2002 and to deal with Yukos under Mikhail Khodorkovsky's leadership in 2002-03. After those deals were rebuffed by direct state interference, Moscow played a game with China and Japan, first promising one and then the other that it would build a pipeline to their Asian destination of choice, but failing to deliver on any of these proposals. Russia failed to live up to many of its previously-announced commitments to China in energy through 2008 [7]. Now we can expect considerably more Chinese investment in both the Russian Far East and Central Asia as Moscow is in no position to object and desperately needs the capital that China can provide.

CONCLUSION

These deals demonstrate not just the failure of Russian policy in the RFE, but also China's growing dominance, through its economic power, of Russia's policy toward Asia—a situation facilitated by the global economic crisis. Russia has seemingly renounced its autocratic dreams in

the Far East and solicited Chinese investment. Courting Chinese power has forced Russia to reverse long-standing Russian policies in the RFE. For all those who are watching for the emergence of China as a dominant economic and political player in Asia, these new deals with Russia have a profound significance that we overlook at our peril.

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Strategic Implications of Chinese Fisheries Development

By Lyle J. Goldstein

With much attention focused on China's growing naval, shipbuilding and port infrastructure developments, it is easy to forget another important dimension of China's maritime rise: China's status as a major global fishing power. With a total haul of over 17 million tons in 2007, China's take is four times that of the nearest competitor, and far exceeds the catch of Japan, the United States and other major Pacific maritime powers [1]. China's massive fishing fleet is concentrated in the Western Pacific, but is also active now on all the world's oceans. This issue should foremost

be evaluated in an environmental context since the world's oceans are now under severe strain from overfishing. Yet, there are also vital foreign policy and international security aspects to Chinese fisheries developments that can not be neglected by U.S. policymakers. Indeed, fisheries issues are a significant security concern among Chinese maritime strategists, because they fit squarely into perceived resource and sovereignty imperatives now driving current maritime development [2]. As a whole, China's actions as the largest world fishing power can serve as an important signal for determining Beijing's willingness to conform to global maritime norms as a "responsible maritime stakeholder."

During 2009, Chinese fishing vessels and fishing policies made global headlines with increasing frequency. Beginning in March with the so-called *Impeccable* incident, in which a few Chinese fishing trawlers in the company of two other enforcement ships and at least one Chinese naval vessel surrounded and harassed a U.S. surveillance vessel 75 miles south of Hainan, represented one of a number of recent and similarly dangerous incidents at sea. Shortly thereafter, China's largest fishery enforcement vessel, *Yuzheng 311*, was sent on a lengthy patrol in the South China Sea following legislation by the Philippines to formalize its offshore claims to several islets in the South China Sea (*China Daily*, March 28). In June, Chinese enforcement of fishery claims came under international scrutiny when Vietnam lodged a series of protests concerning alleged rough treatment of their own fishing vessels by Chinese authorities.

According to one report, incomes of Vietnamese fishermen have declined because of "China's stepped up [fisheries] enforcement," in the vicinity of the Paracel Archipelago (Agence France-Presse, June 26). Then in late June, a major incident erupted between Beijing and Jakarta after Indonesian authorities seized eight Chinese fishing vessels and detained 75 Chinese fishermen, whom were allegedly fishing illegally in Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)—59 of the 75 Chinese fishermen detained were permitted to return to China in July (*Huanqiu.com*, July 11). Such incidents illustrate how the activities of fishing vessels and related enforcement authorities of the Western Pacific region represent one of the jagged edges of volatile maritime territorial disputes. There is a real potential in China—and also among its neighbors—for fishing nationalism to take hold, because resources coupled with sovereignty disputes are at the heart of invigorated naval development in the East Asian region. Unfortunately, fishing tensions could aggravate these disputes to the point of military conflict. The potential for this nationalism is implied, for example, in one recent Chinese assessment that concludes: "Although our country has signed one after another fishing agreements with neighboring states,

the number of fishing industry security incidents involving foreigners has unceasingly increased ... Some [countries] even send warships to bump and sink our side's fishing boats ..." [3].

Official figures suggest that China currently has about 297,937 motorized fishing vessels and approximately eight million fishermen. Among finfish, Chinese are largely catching anchovy, Japanese scad, hairtail and small yellow croaker, while significant subsectors also catch shrimp, crab and squid as well. The dominant method is trawling, though gill nets, set nets, line and hooks, as well as purse seines are also used. The East China Sea accounts for the largest catch, followed by the South China Sea and then the Yellow Sea. Among these sea areas, only the South China Sea region has seen increasing catches of late. Of China's major marine industries, marine fisheries and related industries are ranked as the largest sector. Guangdong and Shandong are the leading provinces measured by fishing output, though Fujian and Zhejiang are close behind [4].

Similar to other fisheries worldwide, China is now confronted by a legacy of massive overfishing that left its proximate fishing grounds depleted. As one Chinese study recently opined: "Now, the fact is obvious that the development of our nation's fishing industry has reached an extremely important juncture. Most—if not all—of the fisheries have been fully exploited, and many are already exhausted" [5]. Another study, published in *Marine Policy*, one of the leading international academic journals on oceans policy, further reveals the scope of the problem. Since the 1960s, fish species in the Beibu Gulf area of the South China Sea have declined from 487 to 238. Stock density reached its lowest level in 1998 at just 16.7 percent of that in 1962, though fish stocks have recovered some in recent years [6]. Unlike most Chinese citizens, it is clear that marine fisheries in Chinese coastal areas have not benefited from the post-Deng economic boom, but rather have been the victims of rapid, loosely regulated development.

The fact that Chinese fisheries are in a state of near collapse have prompted some bold initiatives by the Beijing government, which includes a 'zero growth' plan for production initiated in 1999. By 2004, 8,000 fishing vessels had been scrapped and there is an effort to bring down China's total fishing fleet to 192,000 vessels by next year. Summer fishing moratoriums now exist for almost all of China's coastal areas [7]. Along China's southern coasts alone, tens of thousands of fishermen are reportedly out of work as a consequence of the stringent limits associated with the 2000 Beibu Gulf Delimitation Agreement with Vietnam. With respect to such agreements, one PRC expert recently observed, "[such agreements] have dramatically compressed the work space for our nation's fishermen. These

new difficulties for our hard pressed fleets ... constitute one disaster after another. [The agreements] could touch off social instability in various coastal towns and villages” [8]. To mollify angry fishermen, the Chinese authorities have offered substantial subsidies to displaced fishermen and also supported aquaculture as a viable economic alternative to marine fisheries. Indeed, the aquaculture sector has witnessed enormous growth in China during the last decade. One potential bright spot regarding PRC fisheries and coastal environmental protection is that China has designated a very considerable number of marine reserves along its lengthy coast [9]. Experience suggests that marine reserves may be an effective tool for recovering the health of damaged fisheries, but related enforcement measures are not especially promising to date.

Indeed, China’s Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC), as Beijing’s major enforcement tool for fisheries management, appears to face significant challenges. Unlike the United States and Japan, China lacks a single unified coast guard with a broad maritime enforcement mandate. As a result, according to one PRC fisheries expert: “Although the central government has taken steps ... the results are minimal ... Fisheries enforcement is congenitally deficient ... The failure of fisheries management is already beyond dispute” [10]. Among the various agencies responsible for coastal management responsibilities in China, the FLEC, which is subordinate to the Ministry of Agriculture, appears to lag well behind other better funded and managed agencies, such as the Maritime Safety Administration (of the Ministry of Communications). Recent reporting does suggest that the further development of FLEC is an increasing priority for Beijing. Various modern methods, such as vessel monitoring systems for example, have been introduced into FLEC management practices. Nevertheless, interagency difficulties are amply evident, for example in a study written by faculty members at China’s coast guard academy in Ningbo (a part of the People’s Armed Police of the Public Security Ministry), which states: “The fisheries enforcement department has the function of escorting fishing vessels ... but are unarmed... The public security maritime police ... [are] equipped with all types of weaponry ... [but] because of limitations on jurisdiction can only play a supporting role, and are in an awkward position” [11]. The further development of China’s maritime enforcement capabilities, perhaps in the direction of a unified coast guard, could have profound consequences for both regional maritime governance and Chinese ability to better enforce its maritime claims in the region.

Yet, Chinese fishing fleets’ activities are much more than a regional issue. Although China’s distant water fishing (DWF) fleet was only created in the mid-1980s, by 2006

it has grown to nearly 2,000 vessels operating on the high seas and in the EEZs of 35 countries [12]. The Chinese DWF fleet is actually supported by subsidies from the central government as part of an effort to divert Chinese fishermen out of local waters that have been fished out. For instance, according to an authoritative source, the number of Chinese fishing vessels in West African waters at any one time could be close to 300 vessels at any given time [13]. With relatively low technology compared to European distant water fishing fleets, Chinese vessels are not pursuing prized blue fin tuna, but more likely to be fishing for mackerel and other lower value species. Often, this fishing is legal within the EEZs of the given state, but it is precisely these fish that have previously sustained coastal fishermen around the developing world, creating the possibility that Chinese fishing practices could contribute to a food crisis in Africa and other poor countries. Indeed, one theory informally circulating in maritime circles posits that piracy in the Gulf of Aden is actually a byproduct of overfishing by external powers, who have forced local Somali fishermen into other “careers.” China has thus far refused to ratify the UN Fish Stocks Agreement (in force as of 2001), though it should be noted that some concrete reforms have been undertaken by Beijing to control and monitor its DWF fleet.

Beyond the potential for dislocations associated with unsustainable fishing practices, there are a number of implications of China’s major role in world fisheries for international security. First, it is quite plausible that Beijing’s wide ranging fishing fleets offer quite extensive opportunities for enhanced “maritime domain awareness” in certain strategically sensitive sea areas, ranging from the Indian Ocean to the Central Pacific. If China adopts a more expansive blue water naval posture in the next decades, with an enlarged presence for in the Indian Ocean and off of Africa’s coasts for example, then these fishing fleets will have been important in developing China’s knowledge base with respect to prevailing local conditions. Second and consistent with the Chinese tendency toward close integration of civil and military institutions, China’s large fishing fleet is already integrated into a maritime militia that could render crucial support in a hypothetical military campaign, whether ferrying troops across the Taiwan Strait or laying mines in distant locations. The sheer number of fishing vessels that could be involved would present a severe challenge to any adversary attempting to counter this strategy. Most importantly, there is the unfortunate potential that a fishing dispute involving loss of life—which happen in East Asian waters with disturbing regularity—could serve as tinder for nationalists on one side or another, provoking actual hostilities between disputing, and well-armed claimants in the region. Finally, there is the strong likelihood that Beijing will continue to use the Chinese

strategy of “defeating harshness with kindness” (*yi rou ke gang*) and thus deploying unarmed fishing vessels or fisheries enforcement vessels to confront foreign vessels operating in its EEZ and claimed waters.

Despite the above concerns, evolving Chinese fisheries policies could also serve as a catalyst for cooperation with other states in East Asia, as well as with Washington. Indeed, the U.S. Coast Guard has actually been working for more than a decade in the North Pacific with the China FLEC to enforce a U.N. prohibition on drift net fishing. This cooperation has involved FLEC personnel temporarily being assigned to U.S. Coast Guard cutters—a highly innovative form of cooperation. Other forms of operational and scientific cooperation might address environmental, weather emergency, rescue, and enforcement aspects of fisheries management. One further encouraging example is that fisheries are now playing a role in the important warming trend between Beijing and Taipei, itself a major fishing power.

Indeed, this warming trend has gone a long way to calming tensions in East Asian waters of late. China’s counter-piracy mission off the Gulf of Aden is another example of the great potential of Beijing’s positive contribution to international maritime security and stewardship. Recent tensions in the South China Sea area should not spoil the new climate of cooperation and collective responsibility. The evolution of Chinese fishing practices in the Pacific and around the globe will provide a useful and concrete gauge of Beijing’s intent to abide by global norms of international security and environmental sustainability as a genuine responsible, maritime stakeholder.

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NOTES

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